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ABSTRACT

This how-to booklet offers specific advice on producing video or slide/tape programs for marketing independent schools. Five chapters present guidelines for various stages in the process: (1) Audio-Visual Marketing in Context (aesthetics and economics of audiovisual marketing); (2) A Question of Identity (identifying the audience and deciding on themes to express the school's personality); (3) Slide/Tape or Video? (advantages and disadvantages of each format); (4) Choosing a Producer (professional vs. in-house production, production styles, and the producer's personality and background in education); (5) Steps in Production and Distribution (initial meetings with the producer to conceptualize the program, script development, interviews with members of the school community, recording of school sounds or music, recording of narration, selection of recorded music, photography of school scenes, editing, display of rough cut, reediting, and final presentation). Each chapter includes a roundtable discussion of its topic by audiovisual producers, and sidebars provide notes from a director of admission, a comparison of video and slide/tape, a description of a producer's experiences, a check list of production steps, and a sample production schedule. An addendum discusses the case of day schools, and reprints of three articles on audiovisual marketing are appended: (1) "The 'Lite' Guide to AV Marketing" (Rick Cowan); (2) "Video Viewbooks" (Mary Landers); and (3) "A Star Is Born: Pre-Production Planning--from the Beginning" (Valerie O'Brien Smith). A directory of slide, video, and film production companies is also appended. (MES)

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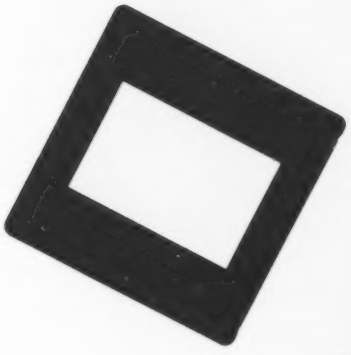
THE AUDIO-VISUAL MARKETING HANDBOOK

FOR INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS



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THE AUDIO-VISUAL MARKETING HANDBOOK
FOR INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

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INTRODUCTION

THE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL MARKETER AND THE VIDEO REVOLUTION

It's one of those quiet revolutions that periodically transform American life. In 1986, 31% of all US households—some 33.6 million families—owned a videocassette recorder (VCR). The increase from 1985 was an astounding 9.5 million units. 1987 factory sales of table—model VCRs are expected to top $3.78 billion. As with television itself in the 1950's, per capita VCR ownership is likely to keep climbing thanks to falling prices and widening acceptance of the video culture that has made renting a videotape no more unusual than checking a book out of the library or buying a magazine.

However you regard the phenomenon personally, video's ascendancy has clear implications for the marketing efforts of independent schools. As more and more schools invest in professionally-produced programs, the inexorable laws of the marketplace are raising the ante for how much schools must spend in order to compete.

AV marketing presents both new opportunities and new pitfalls. An effective video or slide/tape can stir the emotions of every member of your school community from the youngest applicant to the oldest alumnus. A poorly done video can misrepresent your institution with glitz and insincerity or embarass it with technical incompetence.

The *Audio-Visual Marketing Handbook* is a how-to booklet offering specific advice on producing video or slide/tape programs. It features the voices, through articles and interviews, of those most directly involved in the process — audio-visual producers and directors of admission. And for those who choose to take the plunge, it describes the steps from selecting a producer to employing the final product. In addition, there is an addendum on day schools' use of AV marketing, a selection of specially commissioned or reprinted articles, and a list of producers known to the Boarding Schools staff.

*The **Audio-Visual Marketing Handbook** is a how-to booklet offering specific advice on producing video or slide/tape programs.*

CHAPTER 1

AUDIO-VISUAL MARKETING IN CONTEXT

Bearing viewers on a magic carpet, a video ravishes eye and ear, slides past reason, penetrates the heart, and stirs that inner excitement that underlies so many of life's most crucial decisions. It's safe to say that no other piece of recruiting material will have as much emotional impact on the prospective applicant. Although the wise admission officer knows that a video cannot supplant the viewbook, catalogue, or brochure in conveying facts and information, nothing can approach the power of film to impart the illusion of having been there, of having seen the colors, heard the sounds, and met the people.

ECONOMICS

Granted, video has power, but can schools afford to use it? The question is better put, can schools afford *not* to use it. Most already do — a clear majority, according to recent surveys. More are investing in video or slide/tape programs every year, partly in response to some demographic and economic facts that are putting the squeeze on all independent schools.

Only a tiny fraction (about .2%) of America's elementary and secondary students attend independent schools. Over half of those that do are enrolled in parochial schools, leaving .9% as members of NAIS. Due to a long term decline in birth rates, the pool of students from which these schools must draw their students is shrinking. With the same number of schools competing for a smaller number of students, competition is heating up. Independent schools may occupy a lofty niche in the marketplace, but it is a marketplace nonetheless. Although neophytes often wrongly equate marketing with advertising, promotion is one of the key ingredients of successful marketing. AV promotion is ideally suited to our intangible product.

Let us not overstate the case. Audio-visual promotion alone will not assure prosperity or even survival. Moreover, like all forms of advertising, its cost effectiveness is difficult to pin down in concrete dollar terms. Yet my research revealed no school that has regretted its decision to invest in it. An average program costs about $22,000; but if that program yields just a single additional student, the tuition paid over four years will more than make up for the initial outlay.

Audio-visual promotion alone will not assure prosperity or even survival.

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

• *Roundtable Members*

To hear it from the horses' mouths, we asked a number of audio-visual producers questions keyed to the topics explored in this handbook. Their replies, some written and some spoken, have been cobbled into an imaginary "round-table" discussions and debates.

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ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

- *AV Programs & School Marketing*
- *Hallmarks of Effective Video*
- *Successful Interviews*

Why should schools use audio-visual programs as part of their marketing effort?

RUSSELL: I think two of the best reasons for a school to use an audio-visual product are:

1) that it can give a broad overview of a school quickly and interestingly, and

2) that it can give one a sense of what it might be like to actually go to that school. In the case of a boarding school wanting to attract more students, I believe that the sense of experience that may be conveyed by film or video is unequalled in power as a marketing tool.

I believe that the sense of experience that may be conveyed by film or video is unequalled in power as a marketing tool.

Russell

WEISS: Schools should use audio-visual as part of their marketing efforts in order to show their school to the best advantage under controlled conditions. In this way, information can be presented consistently, accurately, and in a set time length. This provides a visual extension of the school.

Control is a key concept — you control what the viewer hears, what facts about the place are emphasized. You can filter out anything potentially negative.

Parker

PARKER: I agree that "control" is a key concept. If you think of an audio-visual program as a substitute for a tour, it enables you to pack into ten minutes a far more thorough, revealing and enticing experience than an actual visitor to a school might get in several hours. You control what the viewer hears, what facts about the place are emphasized. You can filter out anything potentially negative. You can showcase your best spokesmen and the most attractive territory, both physical and mental. You eliminate the haphazard element of his first exposure to the institution.

Remember, audio-visual marketing is a branch of salesmanship, and a classic sales technique is the "hook." People's attention span is limited, especially young people's, and if you don't hook their interest quickly, you've blown it. Audio-visual gets the hook in more effectively than anything else. Then you can add information by means of interview and printed material to round out the picture.

MACKSOUD: I'd add one thing. I find that most schools don't have to be convinced of the value of audio-visual, because they know that without it they can't compete.

BROWNE: Why videomarketing? Video conveys the vibrant life of a school and its community to audiences miles away — or next door. It communicates what you've never been able to show before: faculty and students in the classroom and in informal settings, as well as talking directly to your audience; scenes of drama, sports and the special events of school traditon; the *process* of

Video conveys the vibrant life of a school and its community to audiences miles away — or next door. It communicates the process of education more than the product.

Browne

education more than the product. Once completed, a videotape can give a school a renewed spirit, one which is exciting to students, parents, faculty and alumni. Their enthusiasm can often be the most effective marketing method a school can use.

What are the hallmarks of an effective tape?

RUSSELL: It works. It is interesting, credible, compelling and it achieves its purpose fully. The things that make it good are the clarity of its objectives, knowledge of how and to whom it will be shown, the quality of the ideas in its concept, and the craftsmanship and care of its producers. It knows where it's going and it continually pursues its goal.

The documentary style lends a sense of authenticity that is unmatched by other approaches.

Russell

At Telequest, we believe that the documentary style of production works particularly well for schools. Although it may be more expensive than a narrated presentation — it requires more shooting and editing time — it has many advantages. Chiefly it lends a sense of authenticity that is unmatched by other approaches. The film we produced for Hotchkiss used our documentary style and had no narration. In fact, it had no script. Yet it was well-planned and the organization of shots, interviews, and other materials took place in the editing phase. The effectiveness of this film and of this technique comes of good planning, good interviewing and a lot of good editing.

BROWNE: There's a need to involve and entertain your audience. Good producers know the value of alternating quiet moments with active scenes, mixing voices and music, choosing shots with interesting movement and composition, and keeping verbal information concise.

Audio-visual can't (and shouldn't try to) do what print can do best : communicate complex and detailed information. Moving pictures and sounds have their own special way of telling a story. Knowing that before you start to produce a school videotape will make all the difference.

WEISS: I'd say an effective tape starts with a good script, with as much live sound as possible in addition to voiceovers. There should be sharp images with good smooth camera movements and interesting angles. Crisp audio is essential. It must be informative and inspiring. The main ingredient, of course, is getting the message across.

MACKSOUD: Actually, an extremely effective method I've found is to eliminate a written script entirely and let members of the school speak for themselves.

I'd say an effective tape starts with a good script, with as much live sound as possible in addition to voiceovers.

Weiss

My company conducts approximately fifteen hours of taped interviews with students, faculty admininstrators, alumni/ae and parents. The fifteen hours are then edited down to the best ten or twelve minutes. This results in an accurate, unique, truly personal vocal portrait of the school. These "scripts" have the ring of truth and the power not only to increase admissions and fundraising, but also to move an audience to laughter and to tears. If a piece I do doesn't touch hearts, I don't consider it to have succeeded.

PARKER: An effective tape isn't measured so much by the techniques that go into it as by audience reation; I think the most important thing is that after seeing a school program, viewers feel that they *know* the place. Know it at an emotional, people-to-people level, which you achieve by dwelling on the actual people involved in the institution. You need to show them through the whole range of emotions, happy and sad, excited and reflective, because a student's experience is going to be shaped mainly by the people around him, not by facts and figures.

To sound a bit radical, I think it's even more important for viewers to *know* a school than to *like* it. If you try to depict a place that absolutely anybody would like, you lose authenticity and are practically misadvertising. We all know that not every school is suitable for every kid. The goal is to get those enrolled who are appropriate for it.

What Makes for a Good Interview?

MACKSOUD: A successful script is completely dependent upon the success of the interviews, because this is the way the producer gets an understanding of your school. He or she already has an understanding of and feeling for schools *in general*, and could probably take your catalogue and develop an "in general" script that would be true

for your school (and just as true for a hundred other schools!) *You* must tell the story of your *own* school, and the producer must take all the pieces of that story and fit them into a concise, unified, informative, inpiring whole (a whole that lasts no more than fifteen minutes). It is not an easy task, nor should it be if it is to be of use for your school.

WARNER:

1. Tell those who will be interviewed that they will be talking with us in a conversational manner (they don't have to look at the camera), that they should *not* memorize anything in preparation, and that we select brief portions of interviews for use in the final tape. They shouldn't feel pressure to tell long stories.

2. If possible, schedule interviews in quiet locations.

3. Allow approximately ten minutes for pre-interview discussion and thirty minutes for the interview itself.

4. When desirable, some interviews can be scheduled in the same area, using different backgrounds, in order to save set-up time.

5. When possible choose people who can speak with genuine interest about their own experience. People who speak with energy are often most valuable to the production, but a *variety* of styles of speech is most convincing and interesting to an audience. ❑

NOTES FROM A DIRECTOR OF ADMISSION

To get the picture from another angle, we interviewed Sarah Kirby, Director of Admissions at Dana Hall School in Wellesley, Massachuestts about her experience coordinating an updated version of Dana's video.

KIRBY: Why have a professional program done? Consider the common alternative — a batch of slides that you present personally with a live narration. The success of that depends entirely on who's presenting it. You may have someone good, but how far can they travel, how often can they do it?

A good program can be sent anywhere, even overseas where an increasing percentage of our students come from, and be guaranteed to convey the same message. It gives a greater degree of control over the impression made of your school. It lets you show your best people saying the best possible things.

As for the medium itself, let's face it — kids these days are much more oriented to visual media than to print. Moreover, they're at a highly emotional stage of life, and film is geared to emotions. That's how it sells things, by stimulating desires at a level of feelings. I think it's legitimate to market a school on that basis. Viewers will see our students on film, and the unspoken hope is that they'll want to be like them. They'll want to be conformed to the special image of graduates of this school. After all, that's what any school is offering — an experience that shapes you in a particular way.

When we were looking for a producer we didn't shop around much, but instead chose someone whose work we knew and liked. I'd advise others to go by word of mouth, and definitely to look over different producers' work. If you don't see something you like, don't expect it.

As for costs, we spent around $20,000 for an original production and an update three years later, which we felt to be very reasonable. We have no doubt it will pay for itself, even if it yields just one extra admission.

CHAPTER 2

DECIDING THE IDENTITY TO PROJECT

We begin with two axioms drawn from Socrates and from the fundamentals of composition: Know yourself, and know your audience.

It may seem a simple enough business to record your school on tape, but it's not. You have to choose what to show and what to say, and you can't even begin that properly until you decide who's going to see it.

AUDIENCE

To keep the horse before the cart, therefore, consider the question of audience. We assume that your main purpose is to recruit students; they are therefore the target. But are they the only ones? Do you also intend to show it to alumni, parents, professional associations, or your local media? Do you hope to use it for development purposes?

While every potential viewer group should influence a production's shape, we recommend against aiming at too many. The effort to please everybody can please nobody. It's important to bear in mind the difference between broadcasting and "narrowcasting."

Most of our experience of video comes through commercial television, and it's easy to imitate unconsciously its "broadcast" mentality. To pay for itself, commercial TV must cast its net wide, exert mass appeal, avoid subtlety and be pitched to the lowest common denominator.

This approach may keep viewers from switching channels, but it won't necessarily influence a choice as momentous as which school to attend. Even though the primary audience is youthful, it has a level of intellectual and aesthetic sophistication above that of the average television viewer. The program must also speak to the sensibilities of the secondary (but not insignificant) audiences of prospective students' parents, present students, and their parents as well as faculty, independent educational counsultants, board members, and alumni.

How can these concerns be known? Professional admission officers develop a good sense of what motivates young people to apply to their schools. Even with experience and intuition as their guides, however, many admission veterans now reinforce their perceptions and interpretations with market research. Outside marketing consultants are retained by some schools while others find reliable guidance in their own informal surveys. At its most basic level, school research describes how the school is perceived by prospective applicants and their families. How is it viewed, locally and nationally? Too academic, or not enough? Liberal or conservative

in lifestyle issues of dress and discipline? Strong in "hard" subjects, weak in arts? Too expensive, or within reach of middle-income people? Professional market research firms do more than quantify perceptions of a school's strengths and weaknesses. They make sense of the numbers by explaining their correlations and then work with a school to develop strategies based on their findings.

Of course, no school can become all things to all people, nor can a producer be asked to create a school that doesn't exist. But every institution has many facets and strengths; market research can tell you which ones to emphasize.

It is the affective aspects of identity that audio-visual programs must address. Every school possesses a distinctive personality and ethos that video and slide-tape must convey.

IDENTITY

At this point, horse meets cart, and the concern with audience blurs into the question of a school's identity. This again is not as obvious as it may seem. Market research can indicate how the school appears, but the reality is best defined through hard thinking and discussing by those who know it best.

There are many aspects of a school's identity — its history, location, traditions, the character of its head, students, faculty, staff, and alumni; the academic program course offerings — college admissions record, and faculty teaching qualifications; and, of course, the extracurricular offerings — sports, arts, and multicultural or experiential education.

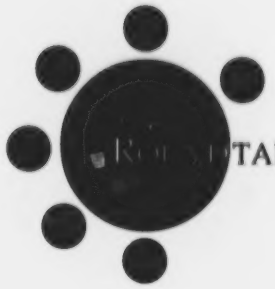
Those identity factors that are of a numerical or extremely factual nature are best left to catalogues and other print media. It is the *affective* aspects of identity that audio-visual programs must address. Every school possesses a distinctive personality and ethos that video and slide-tape must convey.

The process of identifying the few themes that will express your schools personality is perhaps the central challenge of producing an effective audio-visual piece. One producer recommends settling on just four or five themes. If they are genuine, these themes needn't be contrived, but rather uncovered.

For example, a school may have exceptionally close relations between faculty and students that can be shown through classroom scenes or testimonials. Or a school may stress sensitivity to the environment and have a strong outdoor skills program, which gives great potential for dramatic footage. Or it may downplay academic competition in favor of the development of students' aesthetic and moral faculties.

The themes must be genuine and clear, an honest reflection of the distinctive qualities of the school. Another producer says this: "It is my experience that many, many independent schools are excellent. Your script must show what is different, what is 'special' about your school."

A final point — bear in mind why parents send their children to a school. Most are attracted by the lovely, separated, total environment offered by many boarding institutions, which can serve as nurseries for their children's abilities. But increasingly, they also want an experience that helps students relate to a wider world. They're looking for social, moral, emotional, possibly spiritual development as well as academic achievement. Show how that occurs, through dormitory life or service projects that involve students in different social settings. A school's main business is preparing young people for the rest of life, and that requires far more than the AP curriculum.



ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION

• *Preparing for an AV Producer*

What steps should a school take to prepare for an AV producer?

WARNER:

1. Gather a group of administrators, faculty, and students to brainstorm ideas for the tape. Since your audience may be diverse, consider the variety of people who will see your tape before choosing your committee. It's important to make it clear at the outset that these people will be *advisors* rather than a board of directors. The critical distinction is that final choices of such things as shots and music should be made by the liaison person and the producer. Committees are notoriously awkward within the creative process. Besides, they never have enough time. Their best contributions are likely to be in initial idea gathering and in reviewing edited tape.

2. Choose 3-4 themes that will help to guide the production throughout the making of your tape. In a program of no more than fifteen minutes, audiences need a message that is clear and accessible. Some examples of general themes: "academic excellence," "a community of learning," "a liberal education." Then refine those general themes, making them more specific (i.e., "a liberal arts education that doesn't sacrifice professional preparation;" "a community of learning in which every voice is heard;" "academic excellence through primary research.") This will not only help your audience identify you, it will guide the production of the videotape.

In most cases these themes have already been articulated by a school, but sometimes they require some research. Is there a "mission statement" in print? Are you addressing a specific market?

3. Make a "wish list" of scenes, sounds and people you'd like to have in the tape. Include every setting, class, instructor, student, campus facility and off—campus site that you and your committee can imagine wanting. Organize them in order of priority... *and then plan to prune the list!*

Review this list carefully with the producer, choosing those items which are most likely to work best in media, those which must be included because of the schools needs, and excluding those which seem unnecessary. In ten to fifteen minutes, your tape must show scenes which best represent you rather than showing a little of everything that you know is good. In a very real sense, you are "symbol-hunting."

WARNER'S STEPS

1. Brainstorm ideas with administrators, faculty, and students.

2. Choose 3-4 themes to guide the production.

3. Make a wish list of scenes, sounds, and people to include in the tape. Organize them in order of priority — and them prune the list.

BROWNE'S CHECKLIST

- **Define your mission**
- **Position your school**
- **Know your competition**
- **Promote your location**

BROWNE: Here's a checklist in regard to preparation:

- Define your mission. Express the goals to which your institution is committed. Know who you are.
- Position your school. Emphasize the qualities that set it apart. Don't try to be all things to all people.
- Know your competition. Stress your school's advantages in clear, appealing terms to which a young person can relate.
- Promote your location. A nearby city or area with a variety

of activities can be an exciting extension of your campus.

PARKER: The best preparation comes in informal meetings, almost bull sessions, where I meet with school people and we kick ideas around. Then I strongly urge them to appoint a single contact person to avoid hassles and misunderstanding. If they have some slides they think might be useful, from what I call the "image morgue." I ask them to pull them out, though I may only use 2 out of 200.

Another thing is to specify ahead of time the filming dates, and make sure the teachers know you're coming. There has to be extremely good and *friendly* communication, since production is going to take a lot of everybody's time.

PARKER'S PERSPECTIVE

- Kick ideas around in informal meetings
- Appoint a single contact person to improve communication
- Specify ahead of time filming dates and let teachers know about schedules.
- Establish friendly communication.

MACKSOUD: Once you've hired your producer, it's important at the outset that he or she know some essential information about your school. In an initial meeting settle such basic questions as : What's the purpose of the show? Is it for admissions, fundraising, or both? Who'll the audience be? What do you want the show to "say" about your school?

The producer will be able to help you know how long the presentation should be, what format would be most effective (slides, video or film), and what equipment will be needed. At this time make it clear to the producer that you wish to see and approve the work while it's in progress, so that you're not surprised at the end by a product that doesn't please you.

THE MACKSOUD QUESTIONS

- What is the purpose of the show?
- Is it for admissions, fund raising, or both?
- Who'll the audience be?
- What do you want to "say" about your school?

WEISS: Preparing for a video production is a lengthy procedure, but the most common error made is to start without a script. Our checklist for planning consists of the following: concept, story board, script, determination of who has final authority to okay the script and okay the final product for payment. Other things to plan for are music, voice talent, special effects, and whether they expect any out-of-season sports to be shown.

RUSSELL: I'd like to share the experience we had with one school, for it stands out in my mind as the best first step a school could take.

We were invited to the school. We were met by the headmaster, his wife, the director and assistant director of admissions, and the director and assistant director of development. We got to know everybody a bit over lunch, and then sat down to a more formal meeting. The questions came fast: How do we get started? How do you form your approach? What is the production process? What are the relative advantages of film or video? What happens when you come here to shoot the film? How should we be involved?

WEISS' CHECKLIST

- Concept
- Story Board
- Script
- Determine authority to OK script and final payment
- Music
- Voice Talent
- Special Effects
- Out-of Season Sports

We answered, discussed approaches and asked questions of our own: What do you want the film/video to do for you? What special qualities of the school do you wish to highlight? If you could have your audience walk away with but one thought or attitude about your school, what would you like it to be?

We covered a wide range of topics in an open and lively meeting. We were challenged to answer all the questions, but in return, we got a wonderful sense of the school and a feeling, apart from business, that we would really like to do the film. It was a good start and the next steps were evident. I think it worked so well because the school hadn't fixed on what the film had to be. Instead, the meeting was for asking and finding out.

Speaking of budgets, I've taken many calls from schools, asking about our services and how much they cost. And sometimes I hear immediately, "Oh, that's too much, that's out of our range." The door may close right at this point without the caller ever

knowing of the possibilities. A good program may be more expensive than one done at bargain prices, but it will return the investment many times over. I suggest suspending judgment on the budget at first. Discover what it is that will fulfill your needs the best. Then tackle the budget. Remember, an ill-conceived production that doesn't work well and that no one wants to use is worth nothing! ❑

RUSSELL'S QUESTIONS

- **What do you want the film/video to do for you?**
- **What special qualities of the school do you wish to highlight?**
- **If you could have your audience walk away with but one thought or attitude about your school, what would you like it to be?**

Remember, an ill-conceived production that doesn't work well and that no one wants to use is worth nothing!

Russell

CHAPTER 3

SLIDE/TAPE OR VIDEO?

Now that a school has established the themes of its identity, it confronts an aesthetic dilemma that it probably didn't know existed. Heretofore we have spoken generally of "audio-visual" or "film," intending the phrases to cover all forms of the medium. In the field of commercial A-V, there are three from which to choose. A school should decide among them before contacting any producers, since most specialize in only one of the forms.

We will say little about standard l6MM film, since its aesthetic qualities are similar to video. It is also the most expensive and least employed by independent schools.

The real issue is between "live-action" productions and slide/tape, between images that move and those that don't. Both forms have advantages and disadvantages, fervently debated by their respective partisans. These we will allow to speak for themselves, after briefly reviewing the file.

SLIDE/TAPE

The older form is slide/tape, or "multi-image" as some prefer. It's come a long way from the magic lantern, or even from the amateur travelogues that figure painfully in everyone's memory. Some of those unfamiliar with the form express surprise that it has survived, and wonder why anyone would prefer it over video. After some samples are viewed, however, its distinctive qualities grow apparent and its power to move an audience is clearly perceived.

At least some of these qualities might be summed up in the word *more*. A fifteen-minute video might have forty or fifty different scenes. A comparable slide/tape show can have five hundred. Every still photograph reveals a different face, a different building, a different season. If you liken a school to a revolving crystal, slide/tape can show far more of its facets. The images are flashed rapidly, for seconds or less, but the pace can be varied and the sense of abrupt change muted by the technique of slow dissolve. *More* also applies to a simple point of logistics — the screen for a slide/tape show is much larger than any television screen. An image twelve feet tall inevitably has more impact than one measured in inches; it envelops a viewer, overpowering distractions and intruding more forcefully into the imagination. This advantage comes at a price. The equipment to show a slide/tape program properly is more complex and cumbersome; most require two projectors, screen, cassette player and a dissolve unit to allow

smooth transitions. An admissions director who wants to travel with such a program must figure on a lot more luggage space to carry everything.

On the other hand, slide/tape shows can easily be transferred onto videotape; that eliminates the logistics problem, but again, at the expense of having the images diminished in size and sharpness.

A final dimension of *more* is hard to define, but most students of the form agree that slide/tape gains an advantage by its very inability to project movement. It offers instead a series of still images, on each of which the viewer is allowed to dwell for a moment. Whereas moving film virtually takes over his imagination, a slide engages and works with it. It suggests rather than insists, often inducing a mood of reflectiveness that suits an entity like a school, whose essence is more perceptible to the heart than the head.

The real issue is between "live-action" productions and slide/tape, between images that move and those that don't.

Another advantage is the flexibility to detach sight and sound tracks, and show many images during a single speech. When video features someone talking, it usually keeps the camera on him the entire time.

Slide/tape makes no pretense of matching the picture of a speaker with his speech, but is freed to illustrate visually what he's talking about.

VIDEO

For all the aesthetic virtues of slide/tape, video remains the preferred medium, and little wonder. The force of its illusion is unsurpassed, for it puts the viewer *there*. If it co-opts the imagination, most of us yield it up willingly, for it transports us through time and space as nothing else can. Its eye becomes ours, probing and peeping, beholding just the right setting at just the right time. If its effort to portray a school is successful, it leaves us thinking we've actually paid a visit.

Video is especially attuned to youth, whose systems and imaginations run at higher speed than those of their elders. Slides may elicit a reflective mood, but video acts as a stimulant; its turbulent movement quickens mental activity and provokes an excitement that even registers physically. Just observe the effect of good sports footage on the heartbeat.

This trait is both video's peril and promise. But insofar as schools *are* exciting places, there's nothing wrong with reflecting that on film. Those aspects of school life that involve students physically — sports, performing arts, mealtimes, work programs, other recreation — can be shown compellingly through video.

Video has another obverse advantage over slide/tape. While the latter can detach the sight and sound tracks to show more images, video gains versimilitude by combining them. What is seen is simultaneously heard, not as mixed-in background sound but as the authentic audio portion of the scene on film. So in a football sequence, for example, the shouted orders heard from a coach are the actual ones issued from his lips on camera.

The final point in video's favor is not limited to it, since every other form can be videotaped as well. Yet the entire VCR revolution is geared to the little black cassettes that can be shipped and shown so easily anywhere in the world. As noted before, slide/tape can be transferred to video but at an aesthetic price. Video is intended for video, produced with screen limitations in mind. It gains great flexibility on the presentation front, equally useful for larger gatherings or an audience of one.

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

• *Video vs. Slide/Tape*

VIDEO VS. SLIDE/ TAPE: A DEBATE

To examine the difference between video and slide/tape in more detail, we asked four producers to comment on the relative merits of either form.

PARKER: I think of multi-image as a more honest medium than video. You can't use any gimmicky effects like digital cubing, speed-up or slow motion. It's just picture after picture, and for sheer beauty nothing beats a 35mm slide on a large screen. The effect is more introspective. When you change slides every 1/2 to 2 seconds, even with a dissolve unit, the transitions are basically left to the viewer's mind. It doesn't force-feed, it leaves something to the imagination.

I think of multi-image as a more honest medium than video... For sheer beauty nothing beats a 35mm slide on a large screen.

Parker

In video, an interview usually is shown with the standard "talking head," which I find wretched. Multi-image isn't bound by whatever movement the camera happens to pick up. It gets the effect of movement through editing, which gives more control over the aesthetic impact.

Slide/tape has advantages for schools and advantages for producers... its a simpler medium requiring less expensive equipment, its easier to alter or update, and it can be shown on a big screen or as a video.

Macksoud

MACKSOUD: Slide/tape has advantages for schools and advantages for producers. For schools, it's often cheaper. Not always, but by and large it's a simpler medium requiring less expensive equipment. A program is also easier to alter or update somewhere down the line. If a school goes co-ed, for example, you can just substitute some new slides that make that apparent. For presentation purposes, it gives schools an edge in that they can show it either on a big screen or on video, depending on what's available.

For producers, it allows great flexibility in what gets shown. More scenes are possible and you can flash from the chapel to the playing field, for example, much more quickly than you could with video. You can feature more varieties of music, since the sound track isn't tied so closely to the film.

Actually I don't like to stress differences between the forms. I think the best of all possible worlds would be for a school to have a slideshow *and* a live video, separate or combined.

WARNER: A couple of years ago we were regularly asked to advise clients on whether they should use slides or video for admissions and fund-raising. Schools were not only trying to assess what they already had on hand (maybe they should just keep their old show, narrated live?); they were wondering if it was appropriate to go with a new technology. Not many said so, but there was always the spectre of video's lowbrow association with television, hardly appropriate to the world of education.

The decision as to which medium to use remains. But

The video documentary approach makes use of the same dynamics of a person talking to you in a believable way, something which slides cannot do...The hesitation, the tilt of the head, the half-smile, become vital parts of the overall communication.

Warner

schools are now more knowledgeable in asking the questions, and sophisticated in orchestrating their whole package of information to audiences. Video is a possibility that has become increasingly attractive.

In truth, the thing most worthy of consideration is the story. More important than anything else is telling the tale of your institution's quality— its people, their vitality and energy, and the special features your campus has to offer. Time and again, our experience has led us to work hardest on getting interesting interviews from a variety of students and faculty. We ask them not why their school is "great" (answers too often sound the same), but what it is that most involves and excites them, right now. Their telling — about things they know well and feel most interested in — becomes the narration of the tape.

Unlike most broadcast television, with its need to convey information overtly and dramatically, a tape designed for your school can present it by letting your audience meet people — interesting people who are actively engaged in education — without having to make direct claims about the school's excellence. Audiences watch a program that "tells" them (in several ways, including verbally) about a fascinating school. Messages about recruiting or fund-raising are perceived subliminally; they may be more effective because less obvious.

This approach makes use of the same dynamics of a person talking to you in a believable way, something which slides cannot do. It's not so much that we can identify who we're hearing; what counts is that we can evaluate and appreciate them while they're speaking — in the endless ways we do in real life when talking with people. The hesitation, the tilt of the head, the half-smile become vital parts of the overall communication.

Often what makes an interview fascinating are the ways in which an editor can use it. In a recent production, we interviewed a young man who spoke admiringly of his soccer coach, who'd helped him overcome his tendency to hog the ball. Briefly, the tape shows the young man talking, and then we cut away to a shot of him in practice. There's evidence that most of the coach's lesson has been learned, but it's clear that some fine-tuning is needed. We see a brief moment, during practice, of the coach calling his player over to make the point again. Then we cut to the game. He dribbles through a long series of obstacles and finally passes off to a teammate. Learning is in progress.

Intercut with those scenes are shots of his coach, alone and with the young man, then comments from both, and the sounds of the scenes being shown — the many layers of interest that video makes it possible to convey. Our transition to the next topic — the role of advisors at the school — is spoken by the coach as he stands on the same soccer field. He talks about the value of personal communication between adults and young people, and we can sense the reason behind the young man's admiration.

By interweaving voices, scenes and faces in a seamless narrative of sound and image, the videotape guides the audience through the story. We can study the face, listen to what is being said as we see the evidence, and in that way learn something important about the school. In a sense we have *seen* the school in a way that even a first-hand visitor cannot — through highlights of spoken comments and actual events in one tapestry.

But revealing interviews aren't the only reason to choose video over slides. If there is one element which links all schools, it is the amount of sheer *movement* .

By interweaving voices, scenes and faces in a seamless narrative of sound and image, the videotape guides the audience through the story.

Warner

Teachers may fight it, administrators may try to corral it, but good educators take advantage of it. The energy of youth is communicated through movement and a good video producer will capture those moments— both large and small — in which movement reveals the learning process in action. Whether it is the body language of a student wrestling with a lab experiment, or the gesture of a teacher urging the class to consider a fresh perspective, the communication is instant and universal, verbal and visceral.

Video movement is immediate in its appeal, and contagious.

Warner

Movement is immediate in its appeal, and contagious. In several years of teaching film, I was continually struck by the universal attraction of movement occurring in a static setting. An audience sitting in a room, watching and listening, is in fact waiting for events to *happen* . Context is everything, and good editors know that even the smallest movement will have a powerful effect if it is juxtaposed with stillness. As Hitchcock knew better than any, reactions are predictable and audiences are willing victims. As appealing as the slow dissolve of a slide may be, it doesn't take full advantage of this wonderful phenomenon.

Sometimes the remaining anxiety about video — even when all other doubts have been put to rest — is the spectre of a large crew of people, equipment and lights disrupting classes and causing a stir on campus. There's good cause for concern. Too often producers have held on to old-fashioned ideas that make them think on a grand scale even when their subject is as personal a one as learning. Choosing a good producer is your only answer to the problem. Modern video equipment is small and portable, and a sensitive crew, though certainly noticeable on campus, will put people at ease and even generate some lively discussion.

VAN BURGESS: Audio-visual producers are trying to sell a new product, a product that will answer the admissions officer's need to gain a jump on the competition. The new product is video. It's the wave of the future, they say, and if you aren't into video then you're out of touch with today's world.

This is silly. Video is new and interesting and appeals to those who want to use the newest technology. But it may not be necessary for your school. The workhorse of admissions is still the slideshow and it is doing just fine, thank you.

Video claims three main advantages over slides: it can show actual motion; it can show people talking with perfect lip-sync and it can add motion to static scenes by moving the camera. These advantages, it is claimed, make for a more dynamic and engaging show.

I've never accepted the theory that because something *can* be done it *ought* to be done. Invention should never be the mother of necessity, and tails should never wag dogs. Anyone who tells you that you "have to have video to make your presentations effective" is just wrong. As I see it, the problem with video is that it is a medium that enables you to do things that don't need doing.

Video is new and interesting and appeals to those who want to use the newest technology. But it may not be necessary for your school. The workhorse of admission is still the slideshow and it is doing just fine, thank you.

Van Burgess

Slideshows need action not movement.

Take for example an assignment I had for a school in the Virginia suburb of Alexandria. I was photographing a cross-country meet to be used in a slideshow for their development office. There was a lot going on.

Anyone who tells you that you "have to have video to make your presentations effective" is just wrong.

Van Burgess

Some kids were warming up, others were just finishing their races, coaches were going over the details with their teams, and parents and teachers were on the sidelines. I watched one young man finish his race in a state of exhaustion. As I raised my camera to shoot, I saw that he was crying. I was torn between photographing him in his agony and turning away out of respect for his need for privacy. As I wrestled with this, several members of his team came over to comfort him. They sat down on the grass together. His elbows were propped on his knees and his head was hanging down between his arms. As he tried to gain control of himself, his teammates put their arms across his back, leaned close to him and shared a few words of consolation and sympathy.

I took the shot.

I took other shots that same day trying to capture the event for the slideshow. There was the start of the meet with five different schools participating together in a regional competition. At the gun, about seventy-five runners

streamed past me heading out onto the course. I used a wide-angle lens and a slow shutter speed and stood as close to the passing runners as I could get. The result was a wonderfully sweeping image of blurred runners, their arms and legs pumping and heads bobbing.

I also shot individual runners out on the course using the same slow shutter speed and panning as they ran by me. Again, the image was one of smooth action with arms and legs spinning across a streaked background. Unlike the start of the race, these runners were each very much alone.

The three shots, taking up no more than twelve seconds on the screen, captured a truth about cross-country running without any need for actual motion, synchronized sound, or fancy camera movements.

The next time a video producer starts knocking slideshows, you'll know better. The horse ain't dead...in fact it has many races left to run. ❑

The next time a video producer starts knocking slideshows, you'll know better. The horse ain't dead...in fact it has many races left to run.

Van Burgess

VIDEO VS SLIDE/TAPE: THE STRENGTHS OF EACH

THE STRENGTHS OF SLIDE/TAPE

- A 15 minute video might have 40 or 50 different scenes. A comparable slide/tape show can have 500.
- The screen for a slide/tape program is larger than any television screen — it envelops a viewer, overpowering distractions and intruding more forcefully into the imagination.
- Slidetape shows can be easily transferred onto videotape.
- Slide/tape gains an advantage by its very ***inability*** to project movement. The series of still images allows the viewer to dwell for a moment. While video takes over the imagination, a slide engages and works with it.
- Slide/tape allows for a mix of sight and sound, allowing multiple images to support a single speech.

THE STRENGTHS OF VIDEO

- Video's force of illusion is unsurpassed. Its eyes become the viewers, probing and peeping, creating the right setting at the right time.
- Video is attuned to youth; it acts as a stimulant, and promotes excitment and mental activity.
- Video captures the movement of a school — sports, performing arts, mealtimes, work programs — and communicates them in a compelling way.
- Video gains impact and power by combining sight and sound.
- Video can be shipped and shown easily; it gains flexibility in presentation— to one or many.

CHAPTER 4

CHOOSING A PRODUCER

When a school has decided on audio-visual marketing, chosen which form, and settled on the image to project, it is ready for the momentous step of engaging a producer. Now come more quandaries: why go professional instead of doing it in-house? Which style of producer: high powered commercial or low-key "artistic?" Is a background in education important? What about the personality factor? How does a school cooperate with a producer? Who serves as liaison?

PROFESSIONAL VERSUS IN-HOUSE PRODUCTION

Some institutions, especially rich ones, have excellent communications programs with facilities to produce their own promotional materials. Some of the results are very good. But by and large, a home-made depiction of the school looks home-made, and despite the charm that may impart to it, it won't compare well with other programs that are professionally produced. Remember, this show is often the first view of a school that many people ever get, and it may be the only view. An amateurish production can be worse than nothing. While it probably will require more money, time, and trouble, the investment in professional production will pay off in the end.

How are producers contacted? There's no lack of them, and they all travel. This booklet includes a roster of those who've worked with independent schools and whose work has been seen by Boarding Schools staff. It is by no means exhaustive; the local telephone book lists others that may be just as good. Independent school conventions are an excellent place to meet producers and see their work, which they are eager to show.

PRODUCTION STYLES

This last step — viewing their work — is vital, in order to gain a sense of stylistic differences. Some producers are geared more to business and industrial clients who employ them to introduce a new product or to profile a company for stockholders. They have a sales orientation, evident in state-of-the-art techniques common in television advertising. These may or may not be appropriate to a school. As a rule, beware of too much hard-sell or glitz, which can quickly turn off video-wise young people.

Other producers regard themselves primarily as artists and strive for effects more popular in art cinema or public television. That too has its hazards and the result can tend toward the

soporific, an equal danger with young viewers. And of course there are all kinds in between. It's worth postponing a decision until the range of styles has been investigated thoroughly. Schools are in a good bargaining position, for the audio-visual business is booming and crowded with competitors, all of whom aim to please. Try to match an audio-visual style to the personality of the school.

We definitely recommend those with experience in producing programs about independent schools, which has become a distinct sub-genre. Not many companies do it exclusively since the greatest demand for audio-visual productions comes from private business. Yet they've often done a few, and those with an artistic bent profess to like them, insofar as they afford an aesthetic challenge and a relief from hard marketing.

As a rule, beware of too much hard-sell or glitz, which can quickly turn off video-wise young people.

Background in Education

A great advantage is enjoyed by producers with experience as educators, of which there are a surprising number. Ex-teachers can bring a unique insight into the dynamics of a school, and are often motivated by a residual idealism about education in general. They can anticipate the problems that such a project will create in the life of the institution, and be sensitive to the effect of shooting on the schedules of harried teachers and administrators.

Personality

The question of sensitivity and rapport is important, since an audio-visual project inevitably intrudes on a school's routine to a perilous extent. It's like a temporary marriage, and schools are only sensible to consider the personalities involved as well as the resumes. If the necessary chemistry is there, the project can go smoothly. If not, it can become a nightmare.

If a certain producer comes across as too pushy or too passive, if there doesn't seem to be much communication occurring or any excitement generated, take heed. Keep looking till the right rapport is felt.

The concrete steps to be taken after a contract is signed will be considered in the final chapter, but we would mention at this point the value of clearly establishing a single contact person for the project. While the entire school community can be represented in the planning and execution, there should be one spokesman to act as liaison. This will assure maximum communication and accountability as well as lessen the chaos that can result from rule-by-committee.

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

• *Selecting a Producer*

How should a producer be selected?

WEISS: A producer should be selected by his artistic ability to capture the "flavor" of the school in the way the Admissions Office would like it to be presented. Proper technical experience and modern equipment that is maintained by professionals is essential.

MACKSOUD: It's crucial, but not always easy, to find the *right* producer. Beware of the "Madison Avenue" type company — while they may do quality work, most produce slick, "canned" presentations that are not, in my opinion, appropriate for independent schools. Their areas of expertise revolve around the corporation. Multi-image shows for sales meetings, product promotion and the creation of "new images" are their specialties. Your school has its own character and spirit. It is not a product nor does it need a new image. Your school, properly reflected, will sell itself.

I suggest that you look at the work of several producers. Do not settle for mediocrity whatever the price. If you don't see any samples that impress and excite you — keep looking. There are companies out there that do fine work.

RUSSELL: I suggest keeping three things in mind when selecting a producer: quality of the work, liking the approach, and "chemistry."

Ask to see the producers' past work. Have them choose what they believe represents them best, and what is most relevant to your needs. In viewing this work trust your own instincts. Do you like it? Does it work its purpose with you convincingly? Or, is it self-conscious, drawing attention to itself by being too "sell-y," too tricky with its effects, or just of poor quality? A good production will have a seamless quality; it will draw you in the way a good movie does and you will be unaware of its technical workings. Its message, however will be clear.

Regarding approach, it's crucial that it be very clear and that you like it. A good production must have structure, a thematic spine, just as a good book does. We often portray it as the clothesline upon which you hang all the facts and details.

I suggest keeping three things in mind when selecting a producer: quality of the work, liking the approach, and "chemistry".

Russell

In our production for school X, a main objective was to change an attitude that the school was cold, uncaring, a pressure cooker in fact. The theme we jointly chose was: the quality of the student/faculty interaction and the caring of both students and faculty about that relationship. Although the film addressed all aspects of school life — academics, sports activities, etc. — this theme came across through out. It's the essence of the school and it was reflected successfully in the film.

On "chemistry," it's important that you feel that you can have a good working relationship with the producer(s). It's best if there's a good sense of rapport, which can almost be measured as a "comfort factor." The best productions are those in which there has been a very good relationship and interaction between the producing company and the school.

PARKER: I certainly agree about the need for good chemistry. And even when you've got a producer you're comfortable with, you have to really work to maintain good communication. The contact people need to press the school's case, to make sure they're getting

what they wanted; don't hold back, don't be afraid to rein in a producer whose own ideas are prevailing too much.

I'd also put in a plug for producers who understand something about education, either through teaching experience or having produced a few school tapes. It makes all the difference if they *care* about the subject. Some of us love trying to get into the soul of a school, even when more commercial clients pay a lot better.

I'd also put in a plug for producers who understand something about education, either through teaching experience or having produced a few school tapes.

Parker

BROWNE: Apropos of understanding education, a producer who knows anything about teaching will realize how spontaneous it is. Much of the learning that takes place in a class, a lab, or the playing field is of such a subtle nature that it's easy for the untrained observer — producer, camera operator, or editor — to miss. It might be the moment a student makes a breakthrough in understanding a formula in algebra, or begins to master a ballet move. The look of accomplishment is often quiet.

The best material in school videotapes can't be directed by a video producer. It simply happens. You can ask the right questions, shoot a lot of footage, and spend many days on campus, but the only way to record the most revealing and accurate scenes of a school is to *anticipate* what will be happening in the events you record. Since so much of any production is found art, responsiveness to the material as it is happening is a requirement. That's something to look for in a producer. ❑

Since so much of any production is found art, responsiveness to the material as it is happening is a requirement. That's something to look for in a producer.

Browne

CONFESSIONS OF AN AUDIO-VISUAL PRODUCER

by Anne Macksoud

First of all, I confess that I don't like being called an "audio-visual producer." The reason is that I don't like most audio-visual productions — especially ones related to education. I find them generally boring and utterly predictable. My reaction to them is much the same as it is to a tedious evening spent impaled on the projector beam of a friend's latest European trip.

My second confession is that I like even less being called a "vendor," the term commonly used by school administrators to identify the likes of me. It conjures up visions of the hot dog stands and Good Humor trucks of my childhood, and for one who thinks of herself as artist and educator, the term is at best deflating.

I now confess that I do like the challenge of translating a vibrant, multidimensional school into a fifteen minute sound/slide program that truly portrays it. As I go about it, this work begins with the making of a soundtrack. Early in my career I concluded that it was impossible to really capture the special character of a school by using a written, narrated script. Instead, my company conducts about fifteen hours of taped interviews with students, teachers, administrators, parents and alumni/ae. The task then is to edit these fifteen hours of tape down to the best twelve minutes, and put those twelve minutes together in such a way that they convey the essential spirit of the school. The end result is a script "written" by the school community itself.

A typical soundtrack includes twenty to twenty-five different voices. The music behind these voices is taped primarily from student performances. To me, this process, however intricate and laborious, produces a vastly superior finished product, especially when compared to the typical slideshow script filled with pious generalizations about education and narrated by a disembodied baritone who has no affiliation with or interest in the the institution.

The interviewing process takes at least three days. Everyone is a bit nervous — with the notable exception of students in K-3, who either don't know enough to be nervous or, more probably, know too much. Since these are confessions, I admit to a fair amount of nervousness myself. I'm always afraid that I won't get the material I need to make a wonderful soundtrack.

To allay these fears and help insure success, I send our clients a list of impossible requests. For example, I ask that:

1. I be given a perfectly quiet room, know-

Early in my career I concluded that it was impossible to really capture the special character of a school by using a written, narrated script.

ing all the while that no such room exists on a busy campus.

2. Representative students and teachers be sent to this room (in groups of three) every half hour for the several days we're on campus.

3. These students and teachers be articulate, profound, witty, compassionate, and generally fascinating.

4. They be all these things with a large black microphone held two inches from their lips.

The fact is, impossible requests and nervousness notwithstanding, the interviewees soon relax, forget the microphone and give me exactly what I hope for — vital, honest and spontaneous responses to the questions asked.

It is the right combination of three elements — voices, visuals and music — that makes the finished product more than just another slideshow...and the process of searching for this combination makes me understand myself as "artist" rather than "vendor."

While my colleague is managing the major part of the interviews, I get to indulge in my favorite part of this work — taking pictures. By now, everyone is used to seeing me around campus, so I can slip quietly in and out of classrooms capturing the wonderful faces of students and teachers at work. I take photographs several times during the year, so that the final slideshow catches the rhythm of the seasons and the continuity of the school year.

Whenever possible, I time these photographic visits with scheduled student productions and concerts so that I can tape as much music as possible. The music is as important an element as the pictures of the interviews, because it dictates the pacing and mood of each section of the show. It is, in fact, the right combination of these three elements — voices, visuals, and music — that makes the finished product more than just another slideshow, and it is the process of searching for this right combination that makes me understand myself as "artist" rather than "vendor."

One reason I like good school slideshows is because I like schools and the people in them. I like hearing what students have to say and I love photographing them. I am always touched by the teachers I meet and their ability to sustain, year after year, an enthusiasm for their students and their academic disciplines.

I spent seventeen years of my life teaching, and I think what happens in schools is of supreme importance in determining the quality of our future. When a slideshow attracts new students and helps a school raise money to increase teacher salaries, provide more scholarships and improve curriculum, then I am content that this enterprise is worth doing.

Lest you feel cheated at the quality of these "confessions," let me close with a few intimate disclosures. I confess that:

— Sometimes I grow weary of the noble sentiments expressed in fifteen hours of interviews, and so I tamper with the tapes (á la Watergate) coming up with an outrageously irreverent and subversive edition of the script which I plot to show to the school's Board of Trustees.

— Sometimes even English teachers make grammatical errors on the tape (most commonly, a singular subject with a plural verb) and I have to search through the entire interview looking for the right verb to splice in.

— I am, at times, more than a little envious of today's prep school students because schools are so much more exciting and the school experience so much richer and broader than was mine.

(Anne Macksoud of Leonardo's Children taught photography and English for many years before founding an audio-visual production company.)

CHAPTER 5

STEPS IN PRODUCING AND DISTRIBUTING

At last the nitty-gritty. We will present the steps of production in chronological order, though that order is somewhat specious. The sequence in which things get done varies from job to job. This listing will at least identify what those things are.

PRODUCTION STEPS

- ❑ Initial meetings with the producer to "conceptualize" (initial brainstorm)
- ❑ Development of a script
- ❑ Interviews with members of the school community
- ❑ Recording of school sounds or performed music
- ❑ Recording, if any, of narration
- ❑ Selection of recorded music
- ❑ Actual photography of school scenes
- ❑ Editing
- ❑ Display of a rough cut
- ❑ Re-editing
- ❑ Final presentation

These vary depending on whether a school has selected a video, film or slide/tape medium. Obviously, the soundtrack for slide/tape is developed completely apart from the photography, whereas video and film record most sound and sight simultaneously.

INITIAL BRAINSTORMING

Regardless of form, the important first steps occur before any equipment comes out of its case. Producers are unanimous in stressing the need for planning things out in detail. This doesn't mean devising a rigid order of battle that will act as a creative straitjacket. It just provides an outline to work from, a means of making mistakes on paper before they get expensive.

There are roughly two phases to the discussion process: conceptualization, and the writing of a script. The first phase enables school personnel and producers to get acquainted and thrash out general themes for the production. Since everyone on earth secretly wants to make movies, there should be no lack of ideas about what would be of cinematic interest.

What settings on campus are most alluring? What students or teachers would give a good interview? What ceremonial or sports events would be important to record? Most important, what distinctive qualities of the school should be highlighted, both to give an accurate picture and to best attract enrollees?

This process ought not to be rushed, and

those involved should be giving some hard thought to the questions before any meetings take place. Naturally all the ideas won't be feasible — that's why professionals have been hired. But the more input is provided by school personnel, the more accurate will be the final product. If it's insufficient, the producers will still be able to confect a show, but it will have a generic look and not really succeed.

The Script

Moving from general to particular, a rough plan of actual scenes can now be developed. All art strives for an artless look, for an effect of spontaneity that unfolds as naturally as life itself. Yet all artists know that the illusion consists of carefully conceived bits of craft; the whole has parts, the seamless garment has many seams.

The best producers strive to allow audio-visual to do what it does best — win the viewer with unrehearsed moments that engage eye, ear, and heart directly.

In the art of audio-visual, the main divisions are scenes, and a script lists them in order.

A note on terminology: we usually think of a script as consisting of dialogue or spoken narration. Many independent school audio-visual scripts contain some of this, but the less the better. An effective script will instead list locations, events, interviews, settings. Don't be surprised at resistance to determining in advance the verbal content of a program. The best producers strive to allow audio-visual to do what it does best — win the viewer with unrehearsed moments that engage eye, ear, and heart directly. These moments are the audio-visual equivalents of what visual artists call found art.

As this concept is a potent shaping force in audio-visual, it's worth discussing. It may be grasped by comparing old movies to new movies. Decades ago, when the youthful art of film still drew on its roots in live theater, movie scripts were like play scripts. Character was established through extensive dialogue, and movies often had the look of a filmed dramatic production.

As the art developed, the amount of dialogue diminished and meaning was communicated visually — through close-ups of an expressive face, through telling physical details that only a camera could reveal. In short, less talk and more action. If screenwriters have a single motto, it is "Show it, don't tell it." Since video, and to a lesser extent slide/tape, employ cinematic grammar, they also reflect this verbal-visual balance. In our case this means that the "voice of God" narrator has been replaced in part or whole by unrehearsed moments and candid remarks.

Laymen assume that a documentary-style program requires someone to tell what's going on, preferably with a bass voice suggestive of omniscience. Professionals can provide that, but many consider it artificial, classing it along with written dialogue as an impediment to the story telling itself.

This remains a question of taste, but we recommend viewing some school programs with an eye to how narration (or the lack of it) affects them. The ideal is to have the information that narration would provide conveyed in other ways.

For example, an unplanned humorous exchange in a dorm room can tell more about the atmosphere of a school than the most eloquent direct statement by the headmaster. And the effect of that exchange may not even be evident at the time it's recorded. That's why producers shoot massive amounts of tape, guided loosely by a script but equally by their artistic instincts. Only later, when hours of tape or hundreds of slides are sifted through in the editing room, do these jewels of spontaneity appear. Hence, "found" art. Using them wisely gives an impression of verisimilitude that breathes life into a work that could otherwise sag.

Producers therefore should be given a wide

latitude in how closely they follow a script. Some scenes that look promising on paper fall flat, while others that were just stumbled upon work beautifully.

As final note on this subject, think "distinctive." Audio-visual programs on schools inevitably fall into a certain pattern; they all have scenes of the main buildings, of classrooms, of dramatic productions, of studying on the lawn, of sunlit commencement exercises. The similarity of programs derives from the similarity of schools and, to an extent, can't be helped. But bear in mind the potential student who may be viewing dozens of productions before making his choice. What is it about a certain school that stands out arrestingly?

One school in Connecticut overlooks a bend in a river. That accident of geography was used for a powerful metaphor on the way students' lives flow toward the school, mingle with it, then flow away again. Every school has some such feature, so think what it may be in your case.

No useful script will be finalized at a group meeting. Let the producer distill the ideas into written form, submit it to the school liaison for approval or revision, and then stand back. A good producer will keep the school apprised of major changes or shifts of direction; he wants maximum communication in order to keep the client happy.

INTERVIEWS

A byword among producers is to let schools "speak for themselves." Not narrowly, through prepared statements of an official, but broadly, through unrehearsed remarks of the widest possible sampling of the entire community. Since the primary audience will be potential students, it is students whose voices should be most prominent. As we know too well, peers influence peers more than anyone else.

Second in importance are the faculty. Surveys of independent school applicants conducted by veteran marketing consultant Sanford Roeser show that the "quality of teachers" is *the* major determinant of a choice of school. And little wonder — they are among the most gifted and dedicated members of the profession, many of whom have traded the higher wages of public schools for the closer relations and sense of common purpose to be found in independent institutions. They are the key to a school's success, and ought to be showcased proudly.

One producer estimates that it takes fifteen hours of recorded talk to get words enough for a ten to twelve minute program.

Members of the administration should certainly be heard from, but in natural exchanges rather than formal pronouncements. If those at the top come across as warm and human, it can add greatly to a school's appeal.

An often overlooked source of outstanding testimonials are the alumni of the school. After all, they can answer the great client concern over whether a school really prepares students for life. Grateful and enthusiastic graduates are like the "after" shot in the classic before/after advertising technique. However, Boarding Schools' director and video marketing aficionado Rick Cowan counsels against going overboard in the alumni success-worshipping mode: "Testimonials from Muffie and Biff at Smith and Yale may discourage students of moderate ability as well as parents who see education as something greater than a means of 'yupward mobility.'"

In pursuit of that spontaneous effect, interviews shouldn't sound like interviews, with linear sequences of question and answer. The questions should be implicit, with the ubiquitous microphone merely recording a number of responses. One producer estimates that it takes fifteen hours of recorded talk to get words enough for a ten to twelve minute program.

Beware the "talking head" (television slang

for static head and shoulder shots of people speaking to the camera.) Students, faculty and other members of the school community can be seen speaking in all kinds of contexts, participating in all kinds of activities. The more life-like the better.

Recording

A related topic is nonverbal sound, the "audio" part of audio-visual. People think of film as principally a visual medium, but practitioners know that much of its power to move derives from the soundtrack. What strikes the eye may get our primary attention, but much of our response is governed by words, music and ambiental sounds.

Quality photography is the name of the game, the bare minimum on which a good audio-visual program is based.

Just as there are characteristic sights to a school, there are characteristic sounds — the tolling of the chapel bell, the whir of a pottery wheel, shouts at a soccer match, the pelting of rain against a dormitory window. These contribute a realistic texture to pictures of the same things. A skillful producer has a keen ear for found sound.

There is still greater power to touch emotions in music. Added-on recorded music, known as "library" music, will be discussed later, but an often-neglected resource exists in music performed by the students themselves. Virtually every school has a choir or orchestra, some of them quite accomplished. Recorded snatches can both entertain and convey a message about how a school develops musical talent.

Photography

Now for the "visual" in audio-visual. Much depends, of course, on the medium — the rules for slide/tape are quite different from those for video or film.

The common link is the need for quality. Some schools have an archive of slides or film that they want incorporated into a program. That may work fine, but they should not hope to save costs by using amateur pictures in lieu of professional ones taken for the purpose. Quality photography is the name of the game, the bare minimum on which a good audio-visual program is based. Professionals expect to discard a large percentage of what they shoot in order to come up with the most attractive portrait possible, and schools should anticipate that.

The comparative advantages of slides versus video have been discussed in Chapter 3. We would only stress two technical points relevant to the limitations of the VCR. Whether video, film or slide/tape, the program is likely to be transferred onto video film and seen on a relatively small screen. For that reason there should be a free use of close-ups, since scenes shot from a distance, however good, will be very diminished.

Second, keep it moving. Slides can provide this illusion almost as convincingly as film, through quick changes of image and scene. But for the camera to rest to long on anything is to risk losing the ever-restless attention of modern viewers.

Music

As noted before, music helps set the tone of a program and can be used to manipulate a viewer's responses. Lively, fast-paced instrumentals can grab his attention, but can also numb it if continued too long. Slower, meditative music can help vary the rhythm and provide good background for scenes showing arts classes, for example. Different kinds of schools are reflected in different kinds of music: drum and bugle for a military academy, classical for the highly academic, modern jazz for the nontraditional.

Producers draw on a vast array of recorded

work called "library" music, where the right sound is bound to be found.

EDITING

This step takes place entirely apart from the school, yet is the most crucial of all. The process is highly technical and highly tedious. It entails the running and coordinating of hours of film and sound, each segment measured in seconds. The all-important transitions between scenes are wrought, to give a smooth flow to the production. Fifteen to twenty hours of recording are distilled down to a few minutes. Here more than anywhere is the skill of your producer tested, for a program lives or dies by what happens in the cutting-room .

Here, the skill of your producer is tested, for a program lives or dies by what happens in the cutting room.

Usually a "rough cut" is assembled and shown to the school personnel responsible for the project, for comment and revision. The producers then return to their laboratories, to emerge days later with the final product.

PRESENTATION

How the program is introduced to the school community varies from place to place. It can be done with or without ceremony, but often occasions great excitement and imparts a strong sense of unity.

For marketing purposes, however, the question is how to get the thing out to its intended audience. In the first chapter we noted the ubiquity of VCRs, at last count located in 33.6 million American households (up from 24.1 last year). It's safe to surmise that anyone who received a copy could shortly find a machine on which to view it.

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

- *Photography*
- *Narration*
- *Music*
- *Production Schedule*
- *AV Programs & Marketing*

What About Photography?

MACKSOUD: Look for:

1. Lots of closeups
2. People *doing* things
3. Candid, not posed shots
4. A good variety of faces, activities, moods

The pictures should be able to stand alone (without script and without the sequence of the other slides) and still be arresting.

What about Narration?

BROWNE: A formal narration can be effective in providing links between topics or interviews, or in explaining something that a student or faculty member just can't say concisely. A brief history of the school, an explanation of the merger between two schools, or a short description of a unique academic program might best be presented through a narrator's voice. But if a narrator is used, the choice should be made with care.

Too often narrators are the one ingredient which spoils an otherwise good tape. With most of their experience in the the industrial or commercial market, professional announcers can make a school sound like just another product. If you plan to use a narrator, choose a professional whose voice doesn't call attention to itself or sound condescending.

On the other end of the spectrum are narrations read by members of the school community who have little or no experience with formal or dramatic reading. The result is a production that is amateurish and boring. Structure your videotape around the heartfelt testimonials of students, teachers and alumni, and your audience will respond to your message on an emotional level.

Too often, narators are the one ingredient which spoils an otherwise good tape.

Browne

MACKSOUD: If you have an "illustrious graduate" who also happens to have a fine speakng voice, it would be a good idea to use him or her. In any case, the narrator should not be called upon to give information that can be more effectively given by a member of the school community. As often as possible, let the students speak for themselves.

Structure your videotape around the heartfelt testimonials of students, teachers and alumni, and your audience will respond to your message on an emotional level.

Browne

What About Music?

MACKSOUD: It's common for audio-visual productions to begin with a burst of exciting music that fades away after about thirty seconds, never to be heard again until it fades in to cover the final thirty seconds. Do not settle for this! Music is the element which, if chosen carefully, creates the emotional impact of your show.

The narrator should not be called upon to give information that can be more effectively given by a member of the school community.

Macksoud

WARNER: If you have music available on campus, consider the possibility of using it in your soundtrack (the best music for school tapes is often performed by students and faculty). Its greatest virtues are that it provides another texture of life at your school and

that it will sound appropriate to your institution. If you don't have your own music, think about what you'd like.

How can a school most effectively use the AV program in marketing?

WEISS: The most effective uses of video or audio-visual could be to offer a loaner tape in magazine ads, to present the tape in public school assemblies, or direct mail to selected parents of students within a targeted age group. Schools might also strive to have their tape permanently available at guidance centers.

RUSSELL: There are many ways to use a production in marketing, depending on the school's needs. Let me stress, though, the importance of planning the marketing strategy at the same time the production is planned. Knowing how the production will be used will influence the shape of the production itself. Here is an example of a college putting video to excellent use in their marketing plan.

Let me stress, though, the importance of planning the marketing strategy at the same time the production is planned.

Russell

College X wishes to increase its enrollment but does not wish to lower its admission standards. The plan — produce a video and send a copy to every student that is admitted. Include bits on academics, student life and activities, and career potentials. Make the student and his parents feel comfortable about a decision to go to college X.

It's a very good approach and not that expensive when you think about it. Most of the applicants will have a VCR accessible, probably at home. The cassettes cost about $6 each and with return postage included, college X expects to get 80% back. And, if you had received acceptances from three or four colleges and one sent you a video that made you feel comfortable and positive, which one would you pick?

The whole idea was well conceived and it allowed us as producers to focus on that student out there.... watching.... ❑

Sample Production Schedule

(Adapted from rough notes sent to clients by WARNER-BROWNE)

I. Schedule the following items after initial meetings with a producer.

A. Site survey (perhaps one day).

B. Script outline approval. Sometimes this "outline" is no more than a rough guide, including scenes to shoot and people to interview, although it might suggest an approximate structure to the tape.

C. Shooting (often eight days, total). Most interviews should be shot first. If possible, leave approximately three weeks for transcripts to be made and selections of testimonials to be chosen before the next days of shooting.

D. Script approval. Included in the script are the actual comments from each person interviewed as well as descriptions of scenes already shot.

E. Rough edit review and approval. The "rough edit" that you see won't have the polish and precision of editing that you'll see in the final edit, but it will show all the same scenes and sounds as indicated in the script.

F. Final edit review and approval.

G. Duplication and distribution.

ADDENDUM

WHAT ABOUT DAY SCHOOLS?

Boarding schools draw most of their students from far away locations; for them, the value of an audio-visual program that can be sent away and substitute for a visit is obvious.

But the ranks of independent schools include many that mix boarding and day students, or that are exclusively day. Is it worth their while to invest in a professional production?

Our research revealed that day schools have been slower than boarding institutions to jump on the bandwagon. Most rely for recruiting on visitation and on the tried-and-true amateur slideshow. Yet they too are beginning to feel the competitive pressures affecting all independent schools. And they are growing more aware of the other uses to which a production can be put — not just as a recruiting tool but as a portrait that can represent a school appealingly to all kinds of audiences.

What different conditions of day schools affect their use of audio-visual? The most obvious, of course, is its cost. By and large, day school tuitions are lower, hence less money is usually available for marketing. For that reason, they tend to employ slide/tape programs if they use anything at all.

That choice has another advantage for day school directors of admission. While their recruiting budgets may be lower, they have the advantage of being able to make most presentations in person, usually in the vicinity of the school. They can exert more control over the impression made, by tailoring presentations to each particular audience. Slide/tape enables them to switch slides as the occasion demands while slides only allow for targeted narration.

Day schools also differ from boarding schools in the extent to which they compete with local public systems. One director of admission gets into as many local junior highs as he can, and he uses a slideshow to good effect. For example, he changes slides to stress his school's superior athletic facilities to one audience, then showcases the beautiful grounds to another.

The flexibility of slide/tape is a great asset, but the existence of any kind of audio-visual program sets off his school for most of his audiences.

Our research revealed that day schools have been slower than boarding institutions to jump on the bandwagon.

Appendix: Other Angles on AV Marketing

The 'Lite' Guide to AV Marketing
by Rick Cowan

Video Viewbooks
by Mary Landers

A Star is Born
by Valerie O'Brien Smith

THE 'LITE' GUIDE TO AV MARKETING

By Rick Cowan
Director, Boarding Schools

Boarding Schools Director Rick Cowan is a frequent lecturer on AV marketing in independent schools. As its title implies, his "'Lite' Guide" offers a brief overview for those who seek basic information in an easily digestible format. This piece originally appeared in the 1987 issue of "Boarding Schools News."

What with everything from books to beer being marketed in 'lite' versions, perhaps the time has come for Boarding Schools to follow suit. Judging from attendance at my SSATB and NAIS workshops and the number of advice-seeking phone calls we field, it's clear that many schools need guidance as they produce their first video or update an existing production. In an effort to satisfy this need for an introduction to the art and science of AV marketing I offer the following six precepts, my 'Lite' guide.

—Rick Cowan

> *Think of yourself as a narrow caster rather than a broadcaster. You're not CBS or ABC and you don't want to be.*

Know Thyself

The process of producing a video poses a rather fundamental question: "Who are we?" Given the multiple constituencies of most independent schools— students, faculty, trustees, alumni, administrators, and benefactors—and the various subgroupings within each of those groups, there are literally hundreds of answers to that question. The trick is to decide which of those answers speaks honestly to the needs and interests of the intended audiences. Veteran producer John Browne counsels: "Identify *four or five major themes* that best identify your institution. Those themes are already in existence and only need to be uncovered."

John's choice of verb is significant. "Uncovered" implies discovery, not fabrication. Schools tempted to use a video to answer the question "Who do we want to be?" instead of "Who are we?" are taking a big risk. The school image fabricated by a producer will ring false the moment the viewer steps onto your campus. However, in your impulse towards honesty in media, remember that this is a commercial not a documentary. You are, after all, *selling* your school.

Know Thy Audience

A sense of audience must inform your video. The best way to develop this sense is to think of yourself as a *narrow* caster rather than a broadcaster. You're not CBS or ABC and you *don't want to be*. Your video will *not* appear on millions of TV screens across the nation and although you might not realize it, that's an advantage. Unlike a mass market advertiser, you have the luxury of crafting a message for the sliver of the American masses who might be interested in independent education. Remember that less than 1% of the nation's students attend independent schools.

So, don't ape network TV in content. Your message should speak to a different and pre-

sumably higher sensibility than most commercial TV programs.

The area where you can take clues from Channel 5 is in production values (camerawork, editing, image and sound quality) which must approach those of broadcast TV. Unless it's a home video or our child's school project, we viewers are merciless judges of production values. What will sloppy camera work, poor audio, or amateurish lighting say about your school? That's why homemade video is such a risk. It's like dressing an outstanding job applicant up in shabby clothes and sending her/him off for an interview. Your school is that person and will be judged by its video clothing.

Here are four ways to enhance audience awareness:

•**Entertain the eye and the ear.** We TV viewers have been trained to expect a certain amount of "eye candy" and are consciously or subconsciously disappointed when deprived of it. If a video fails to entertain as it informs, it fails.

•**Use market research** (such as school perception surveys) to target decisive factors in decision-making. Identify the competitive factors in your market. We can't ask a producer to create a school that doesn't exist, but your school is many schools; emphasize the right ones for the marketplace.

The gifted slide-tape producer Anne Macksoud of Leonardo's Children, Inc. makes this point succinctly: "It is my experience that many, many independent schools are excellent. Your script must show what is different, what is "special" about your school."

•**State your school's strengths as they relate to wider world.** Unlike Peter Prescott's Choate of the 1960's, boarding schools can no longer be 'a world of our own.' In an increasingly competitive educational marketplace, ivory tower benefits may not justify the hefty tuition investment we ask parents to make. Your video should show how skills and knowledge acquired at your school contribute to your students' happiness and success. However, it's easy to go too far in the success-worshipping mode. Testimonials from Muffy and Biff at Smith and Yale may discourage students of moderate ability as well as parents who see education as something greater than a means of yupward mobility. Don't forget that parents expect independent schools to prepare their kids for life...not just intellectually, but morally, emotionally, and socially.

•**Understand what video does well and what it does poorly.** Emotion, motion, affect, and mood are where video's power resides. Print is the medium of choice for statistics, listings, and philosophy of education. The numbers of volumes in your library, scope of AP course offerings, and campus acreage should be left to your catalog or mentioned by your campus tour-guides.

Don't let your head, business manager, board chair, or other authority figure force you to select a producer principally on the basis of price.

•**Find a thoughtful producer.** Find someone who knows education, has intellectual curiosity, sensitivity, and time. John Browne and Gerret Warner tell us why these qualities are crucial to the success of your video: "Since so much of any production is found art, responsiveness to the material *as it is happening* is a requirement. The best scenes in school videotapes can't be directed by a producer. They simply happen."

Another key qualification is editing ability. There are lots of folks who can take pretty pictures, some who can take arresting, insightful pictures, but few who can bring it all together. Just like Hollywood classics, effective school videos owe as much to the editor as they do to the director and camera operator. Sam Russell, Vice President of Telequest, Inc., describes the effect you seek: "A good production will have a seamless quality; it will draw you in the way a good movie does and you will be unaware of its

technical workings. Its message, however, will be clear."

Resist the Purchasing Agent Mentality

Don't let your head, business manager, board chair or other authority figure force you to select a producer principally on the basis of price. Commissioning a video is not like having the school driveway repaved.

It is an artistic *as well as a* commercial decision. Imagine what the Sistine Chapel would've looked like if Pope Sixtus had put it out for bid!

Sam Russell offers this wisdom on establishing a budget: "A good program may be more expensive than one done at bargain prices, but it will return the investment many times over. I suggest suspending judgement on the budget at first. Discover what it is that will fulfill your needs the best. Then tackle the budget. Remember, an ill-conceived production that doesn't work well and that no one wants to use is worth nothing!"

Let your teachers and students speak (or sing, or play music) for themselves.

Less is More

You're making a commercial, not a documentary or visual catalog. If you try to jam 3 seasons of sports, all the drama productions, every building on campus, and a bit from each academic department plus the new school van, you'll end up with a meaningless soup.

Work Wisely with Your Producer

These guidelines may help:

- **Establish costs, schedule in advance.** Link payment to completion of pre-defined stages of script/treatment, shooting, rough edit, and final edit.
- **Use a committee to gather impressions** but appoint one representative to deal with producer. Three people can't drive a car.
- **Develop a script or treatment**.. It allows you to make many mistakes where they are cheapest—on paper.
- **But don't let the script become a straightjacket**. Visual logic is different from the linear logic of writing; transitions jump out at you in the editing room that weren't apparent at the typewriter.
- **Let your teachers and students speak (or sing, or play music) for themselves.** Disembodied baritones and canned music may work for deodorant commercials, but they're often inappropriate for schools. Our "narrowcast" audience is able to and prefers to draw its own conclusions.
- **Do use a variety of faces, activities, moods.** Your subject will dictate certain choices here, but don't let it deprive you of people in action and interaction. Don't overpopulate your tape with "talking heads." The begoggled young scientist by a bunsen burner, a trumpeter hitting a high note, your outdoor leadership program kids rapelling out of their 4th floor dorm windows—these are the sorts of scenes that involve a viewer.
- **Avoid pious, self-serving generalizations about education.**
- **Be wary of special effects.** Glitzy visuals can misrepresent a school's character. Your head's face spinning into the sky or your dining hall dissolving into a zillion little crystals might not work for prospective parents who are investing $10,000 of hard-earned family funds in their child's future...not 60 cents for a can of "Sprite."

Although rational factors are always part of the equation, the decision to attend a particular independent school is ultimately an emotional one. Veteran admission officers realize that their job is to inspire as much as it is to inform. Since video speaks so directly to our emotions, a well-produced tape can be a powerful ally in your struggle to win the hearts of applicants and their families. ❑

VIDEO MARKETING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

VIDEO VIEWBOOKS

With the kind permission of ***CASE Currents*** *we here reprint edited versions of two articles on audio-visual marketing. While these were written for college admission officers, most of the information is equally relevant to secondary schools. The first is from the June 1986 issue.*

Currents *is published by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education, Suite 400, Eleven Dupont Circle, Washington, DC 20036.*

Video is to admissions what the four-color press is to printing — video brings realism to the recruitment messages.

VIDEO VIEWBOOKS

by Mary Landers

Thomas Pollard, dean of admissions at the University of Richmond "backed into" video by sandwiching an older film into more recent video footage. Now he praises the medium for a reason close to a recruiter's heart: He's certain it attracts students.

During the video's first recruitment season, UR collected statistics to evaluate the method's effectiveness. On UR's inquiry reply card, students could ask to receive the video as well as the traditional recruitment packet. Of the 2,400 prospective students who took UR up on the video offer, 18 percent applied. Almost half — 48 percent — of these applicants enrolled. Of the 4,200 who inquired but did not ask to see the video, only 10 percent applied. The yield from this group was only 25 percent.

Pollard was delighted. "Find me a stock brokerage that can give you those kinds of figures," he challenges.

Since video recruitment is a recent innovation, figures of any sort are hard to come by. But even without concrete data to prove its effectiveness, more and more institutions are adopting video as a recruitment tool. And recruiters at those institutions agree that video's more than a fad. It's a necessity.

Why use Video?

With all the recruitment material already bombarding prospective students, what's the point of adding video? To begin with, video can accomplish many recruiting tasks more effectively than traditonal media can. For example:

— *Video appeals to young people.* Recruiters agree that today's students are sophisticated about media. Milton Thomas of the U.S. Naval Academy puts it bluntly: "In today's market, you can't just use print publications. You need a total media approach."

Recruiters also recognize, with some frustration, that their messages compete with the slick commercial media vying for teen-agers' attention. "Kids relate well to things on TV," says Stephen Reynolds, director of publications and public relations at Canterbury School. Video, a

first cousin to televison, capitalizes on this widely recognized affinity.

— *Video makes an impact.* "Video is to admissions what the four-color press is to printing," says Pollard. That is, video brings realism to the recruitment messages.

"I like the way video moves," says Francis Foley, Canterbury School's director of admissions. "Instead of watching just a still picture of students playing football, you can see them running down the field and you can hear the fans cheering."

— *Video shows the institution at its best.* With video, students who can't visit an institution can still get an impression of its spirit.

This can be equally good for students who visit in the summer and need help visualizing the institution with classes in session. "If you come here in the off-season you see a dead school," says Foley.

— *Video's accessible.* Video tops other audio-visual media — such as films or slide shows — for contacting a broad student audience. With video, an institution can reach prospects across the country in their homes and their schools, on their own time.

Several factors account for this. First, it's easy to produce multiple copies of videos for mass distribution. Second, the popularity of entertainment video means many students have access to videocassette equipment. "It won't be long before more than half the homes in America have VCRs," predicts Bob Chapman, president of Learning Resources Network, a video production and distribution company based in Durham, North Carolina.

— *Video's trendy.* Some administrators acknowledge that they added video to keep pace with competing institutions. "I think a lot of it is keeping up with the Joneses," says Bruce Poch, associate dean of admissions at Wesleyan Universtiy. Poch does cite the novelty value of video as one of its benefits. Still, he accepts the medium with some reluctance. "We've given in to the MTV mentality," he says.

Video tops other audio-visual media — such as films or slide shows — for contacting a broad student audience.

The Show Must Go Out

Even the best video won't achieve its goals if no one sees it. Different institutions have developed different methods — or combinations of methods— for distributing their videos.

— *Mailing.* Long Island University's Southampton campus initially contacts more than a quarter of a million prospects. The second mailing these students receive includes a card they can mail back to request the video. Southampton covers the postage both ways at a cost of $1.08 per student. John Russell, dean of admissions and enrollment management, expects to send tapes to about 4,000 prospective students this year. He says that even one resulting enrollment would make the mailing program cost-effective.

Similiarly, the University of Richmond pays for postage. "The catalog is free and so is the rest of the recruitment material, so they shouldn't have to pay for the video," says Pollard.

— *Networks.* For a fee, distribution networks will place videos in high schools in different regional or national markets. An institution can specify what sorts of high schools receive its tapes — for example, schools in the Southwest or ones with a high proportion of minority students. Cost of these services varies widely according to what options the institution chooses and how long it participates.

Once the videos reach the schools, guidance counselors keep the tapes available for interested students. One drawback: Institutions have no way to keep track of how many students actually view the tape. "When we visit a high school we

check, but we have no good monitoring system," says Russell, who uses a network service as well as mail distribution.

— *Recruitment trips.* The U.S. Naval Academy keeps tight control of its video by sending tapes only to alumni recruiters. The recruiters then show the video to small groups or to individual prospects.

The University of Miami offers a traveling recruitment program — or a "road show," as Susan Bonnett, assistant vice president for university relations, calls it. Each recruitment reception includes a screening of one of Miami's two videos. For extra impact, some of the video's stars join the live show.

—*On campus.* Keeping a video at an institution may seem like a waste, since a candidate who's made the effort to visit could just step outside and look at the campus. But videos can overcome bad weather and vacation lulls. Or they can warm up an audience for a campus tour.

"The video gives, in one 9 1/2 - minute presentation, a broader view and more exposure to people's feelings than we could give in their whole visit," says Russel. And , he notes, the 210 acres at Southampton are a bit much to see on foot in one day.

But Does it Work?

Since video is never an institution's sole recruiting tool, it's difficult to gauge its effectiveness. Not only that, recruiters at many institutions report they haven't had video long enough to measure its results.

Results that are in, however — such as Richmond's — point toward rave reviews for the medium. For example, at the University of Miami, Bonnett cites an increase of 40 to 50 points in incoming freshman SAT scores after Miami produced a video aimed at honor students.

Multitalented Tapes

Videos often accomplish more than their producers plan. Recruiters cited these surprise benefits:

— *Boosting self-image* . Several admissions officers note that a well-made video can inspire pride among the institution's people. "Our video's been very good for internal morale," says Russell. "People watch it and say, 'That's right. That's us.' People are proud that there's a video that depicts Southampton as it is."

— *Alumni relations.* When alumni get out of touch with the institution, a video can bring them up to date. Canterbury School, for example, was all-male from its founding in 1915 until it went coed in 1971. The alumni staff shows the school's recruitment video at alumni weekends and receptions so the pre-1971 grads can see the difference girls make at the school.

> *Institutions need to think through their message and how to get it across. They've been doing that kind of planning with their catalogs for years.*

— *Advancement and public relations.* If the quality of a video is good enough, TV stations may use it for broadcast. For example, when a local news program covered the Naval Academy's 1985 commencement parade, the station supplemented its live footage with parts of the academy's video, "Challenge."

Ready, Cassette, Go

Thinking of producing a recruitment video? Carl Allen, Preview, Inc., a Virginia-based video consulting and production firm, suggests you approach the project with the same care you put into your printed materials.

"Print is nothing but blank paper before you plan, produce, and edit. Tape is the same," he says. Institutions "need to think through their message and how to get it across. They've been doing that kind of planning with their catalogs for years."

Experts suggest you start by asking yourself the following questions.

— *What is your purpose?* The purpose of a recruitment video may seem obvious: to recruit. But your goal can be much more specific.

For example, Harvard University produced a video to debunk several frustrating misconceptions — for example, "that Harvard is all white males and everybody wears a suit coat to dinner," says Admission and Financial Aid Officer Janet Irons. Not only are there no suit coats in Harvard's video, but the dialogue contains all the "ands," "uhs," "ums," and laughs of ordinary speech. "That makes it more real," says Irons.

The Naval Academy wanted to cut its attrition rate by recruiting candidates who were well aware in advance of the rigors of the program. So the academy's video emphasizes the difficulties of the first year there — but balances this with footage illustrating the pride of graduation.

You also need to consider how to integrate your video with the rest of your recruitment package.

—*Who is your audience?* Consider what groups of students you want to reach and what their needs are. To make its video most useful for different student audiences, the Naval Academy divided its video into six labeled segments. Each presents a basic aspect of life at the academy. Using their discretion and a fast-forward button, candidates can view whatever segments they choose.

To make their tape more palatable to parents as well as students, Southampton's video features the dean of students. The dean enjoys a strong rapport with young people, but his position also carries authority that appeals to parents.

— *How will your video fit into your whole admissions program?* For example, if the video is to be a prospect's first contact with your institution you can't assume the viewer will know anything about your programs. So the video should make that introduction by including basic information. However, if you intend to send the video only to accepted students, you may choose to skip over introductory material and focus instead on the specific advantages of enrolling.

You also need to consider how to integrate your video with the rest of your recruitment package. Some institutions incorporated themes and logos from their printed materials into their video.

— *Should you produce in-house or hire outside help?* This decision, of course, depends on your budget and your video resources. Reynolds warns that if you do go for outside production, finding the right producer is crucial: "You need to find one who knows colleges and won't present you like General Motors."

Whatever you decide, however, it's important to keep your goals in mind. "If you do it, do it right," says Bonnett. "Nothing is more counterproductive than a poorly done production."

— *How much can you spend?* The cost of a video varies widely according to its length and sophistication. The range of costs for the institutions mentioned here was $7,000 to $30,000. Mark Edwards of Image Presentations in Boston estimates average costs for a professionally-produced video at $15,000 to $30,000. Of course these figures cover only initial production. Making and distributing copies adds to the expense.

Video's Vices

While admissions officers are generally enthusiastic about video, they offer several caveats. Recognizing these limitations can help you set realistic goals for your video.

— *Video isn't a panacea.* "It won't turn things around overnight," says Reynolds. "However, it

can be a great addition to a marketing arsenal."

— *Video can be costly.* A video can easily run as much as a staff member's annual salary. "It's an expensive medium for a small college," Russel says. "Our video cost $20,000 to make. To put that into perspective, our budget for print adverstising for that whole year was $25,000."

— *Video takes time.* A 20-minute video may seem easy and fun to do if you've seen only the finished product. Experienced producers will tell you otherwise. In reality, you'll have to produce much more footage than you could ever use — and then spend time culling through it.

Says Foley, "You may spend an hour to get one scene. When we were taping we'd start at 8 in the morning and not get done till 11 at night."

— *Video conveys feelings better than it presents facts.* One of video's big drawing cards is also its major drawback — a video doesn't work as a heavy factual piece. It's a living display, not the place for static figures and charts.

"Our video doesn't give you a lot of data," Russell explains. "It's a feeling type of show. It presupposes you'll get information from another source —viewbook, catalog, or face to face." ❑

May Landers was an intern at ***Currents*** *in the spring of 1986. She is now a staff writer at International Medical News Group in Rockville, Maryland.*

A Star is Born

Pre-production planning — from the beginning
by Valerie O'Brien Smith
(adapted from ***CASE Currents***, January 1985)

Like any institution planning to portray itself on film, Skidmore College thought in terms of scenes: the people who would play "perfect" parts, the way the camera would pan over a favorite building or stretch of landscape. These memorable scenes are the images great films are made of.

But as Skidmore found out, a hefty period of hard self-analysis and strategic decisions comes before the cameras ever roll.

Says Bill Walker, Skidmore's director of public affairs, "I wondered sometimes, 'Is this really necessary, to be this precise and to plan in this much detail?' But once we began to shoot, I saw it *was* all necessary — to get the most out of our shooting days, to figure out the logistics of getting the film crew around."

Walker was referring to a phase in filmmaking called pre-production. It covers everything from your initial plans to the moment shooting starts. Technically, pre-production begins when an institution hires a film producer (unless you're producing in-house). Actually, though, pre-production starts long before that, when an institution first discusses its film. The process continues as you develop ideas, form a committee, focus on the film's major points, do research, interview, write a script, and schedule interview subjects and scenes that need to be shot.

In short, pre-production is a vital step in making a film, even though it doesn't involve any film production per se. This is the time for your institution to take stock of its needs, pare them down to a workable subject, and decide how to translate the film's goals into visual and emotional terms.

Walker calls the process "absolutely crucial". A colleague says that "50 to 60 percent" of the final product's success depends on pre-production. But even before that phase, you have some decisions to make.

Deciding if Film Works for You

First you need to be sure that film is the best vehicle for what you want to do. It's not if you want it to catalog your institution's virtues and needs in a lengthy narration. Film is at its best when it speaks to the emotions and wins the heart, thus setting the stage for written and in-person interviews. Film should complement the written word, not replace it.

To develop a top-flight film, your institution must focus on its needs and be willing to spell out those needs in motion picture terms. You as campus coordinator must also make lots of pre-production decisions. Do you want a development film or an admissions film? If you try to cover both, you'll end up with no focus at all — and a film that does neither job well.

I wondered sometimes, 'Is this really necessary, to be this precise and to plan in this much detail?' But once we began to shoot, I saw it was all necessary.

Let's say you want a fund-raising film. You have to ask such questions as whether the film will be part of a campaign, and which part. How will the film work in conjunction with events, speeches, or brochures?

Answering questions like these at the beginning of a production simply defines how the film will evolve. That kind of precise planning also helps you make a stronger pitch for your film's budget.

Seeking the Cutting Edge

Few colleges and universities have identical film needs. A close look always reveals rich differences in culture, location and other factors that make an institution unique.

Filmmakers can assist clients first by spending time on a campus researching its needs. During this scouting expedition, filmmakers should poke around the library and archives, visit classrooms, watch athletic events, and talk to lots of people. The goal should be to zero in on what's distinctive about the place, and, if possible, to tape interviews with students, faculty, and administrators.

Campus representatives should help filmmakers select people to interview. Then, when the filmmakers transcribe these interviews, they can see who are the best subjects for the film. The transcripts do double duty because often they can be used in writing the script. And because the interviews are of professional quality, they can serve as voiceover in the film.

The Insider's View

Obviously, campuses considering a film project have a great deal of groundwork to do. Skidmore's film started "with a couple of people who had an idea about how film could fit in with the rest of our communications," Walker said. "We needed a message with emotional impact to go with publications we already had." From that idea, Walker wrote up a proposal and submitted it to top administrators and faculty members. An informal group of faculty department chairs and administrative heads interviewed the final selection of film producers. From the production stage on, Walker and the director of alumni affairs coordinated the project. However they routinely contacted administrators and faculty to solicit reactions and to report on progress.

At the University of Rochester, Senior Public Affairs Officer Don Lyon's first step was to form a committee. Lyon chaired the group, which agreed on a brief statement of the film's most important objective. The stated objective sounds simple: "To encourage quality students to apply to the University of Rochester." But writing it, he

says, took as much time as any other aspect of the production.

"Once you've got that objective," says Lyon, "the film's content seems to come to you. You ask, what are the characteristics of that quality student? What does the University of Rochester offer that would make that student come here?"

Answering these questions also helped the university select the right students to interview, to write into the script, and to profile in the film.

Despite their bad press, committees *can* work, according to Lyon and Walker. But both strongly advise keeping the number of committee members as low as possible. And, they add, have the buck stop with a strong committee leader.

"It's best to keep the committee to a group of four or five, " says Lyon. "You are going to have a good deal of disagreement anyway. If you have fewer people, it's easier to resolve those disagreements."

As for the committee leader, he or she "must take responsibility for handling everything that goes into production," says Walker. "No mixed messages. Decisions and ideas coming from different sources have to be channeled through a single person, or you'll have chaos."

Lyon recommends having "some top brass person" waiting in the wings as a final arbitrator. Consult this person, he says, only if the committee reaches an impasse on a serious decision.

Both Lyon and Walker advise coordinators to stay closely involved in every step of the production.

Lyon, for instance, sat in on all 55 taped interviews for the Rochester film. "We knew from the beginning that we wanted no narrator," he recalls. "The interviewers made sure questions were answered in full sentences, complete with subject, so that the absence of a narrator would not be a problem." By getting so deeply involved, Lyon always knew what material the interviewers were gathering. And he could add his own questions at the end when he wanted.

Walker remembers the large amount of time he spent helping identify what needed to be shot. He also helped get special equipment for the crew, such as a cherry picker for vertical shots and a helicopter for the film's opening aerial sequence.

Lyon, too, recalls spending "days and days" scheduling a 12-day shoot. Rochester wanted to cover at least two seasons, autumn and winter, as well as sports activities. "It took a lot of planning to make the seasons and scheduled activities coincide with the limited period of time the crew would be on campus."

Film is at its best when it speaks to the emotions and wins the heart, thus setting the stage for written and in-person interviews.

The Value of Outside Expertise

During this research and interview period, an outside producer's experience and objectivity can be a great help. For one thing, says Walker, there's the notion that you're bringing in an expert. "A professional team gives others confidence in the validity of the whole thing. This is someone who is there to work on the production. Everyone thinks more seriously."

An outsider's objectivity also helps. At one campus, everyone we talked to felt that a particular professor would be a perfect film subject. He was witty, they said, and all the kids loved him. It occurred to no one that the professor's stutter, immediately obvious to us in the interview, would cause trouble on film. In an isolated voiceover, his speech problem would distract.

Pre-production and Beyond

Whether or not you use an outside producer, take this advice:

— *Don't showcase campus superstars unless they contribute substance to the film.*. Every institution

has administrators and others who deserve credit for their fine work. What better way to honor them than with a cameo appearance on film — right? Wrong. In most cases, these cameos are not as visually or emotionally appealing as students and faculty profiles and fast-moving montages. Instead, why not have your star introduce the film or comment afterward in person, not on film, or work the person into a filmed scene with some action?

—*Use people in action and interaction.* Colleges are loaded with dynamic people whose actions create magical interplay on film. There's the biologist crouched over a microscope, surrounded by samples, or the student struggling at a computer terminal, finally making a breakthrough. There's the home basketball team pounding down the court as overtime minutes tick away, or the rousing performance by the campus orchestra. In all of these scenes, film stimulates emotion and helps the audience feel a part of the scene through deftly coordinated sound and movement.

It gave me a new and different view of a place I thought I knew very well. I did know it well, but now I know it much better.

—*Have everyone agree on the script before production.* Don't start shooting until everyone involved OKs the script. After all, the script structures film and guides the producer in scheduling the shoot. Making script changes before production begins is less costly than reshooting a scene. Besides, a solid script fosters creativity in shooting and editing, and soon the film takes on a life of its own. That's when a film works.

—*If you're considering an outside producer, hire someone who has both intellectual curiosity and time.* The person should have a genuine interest in the project and a production schedule that allows time to grasp the essence of an institution. Needless to say, this takes more than a week.

The Rewards of Time and Trouble

No filmmaking lacks headaches. But Skidmores's Walker says that he has no regrets about his hard work. "I knew what had gone into the production," he says. "I knew we'd given it our best shot. And with that knowledge, it was easier to be a spokesman, to report on progress, and to make the case for an occasional budget adjustment that I knew was important."

And in all the planning and research that make a successful film possible, there can be hidden rewards. Says Walker, "It gave me a new and different view of a place I thought I knew very well. I did know it well, but now I know it *much* better." ❑

Valerie O'Brien Smith is executive vice president and a producer for Seven Seas Cinema in New York City. One of her projects was pre-production on a film for Colgate University's $75-million campaign.

APPENDIX II

AUDIO VISUAL PRODUCERS RESOURCE LIST

The following names of slide, video, and film production companies are offered to help schools with their audio-visual marketing efforts. This list is by no means complete and is intended only to introduce some of the many producers now interested in working in the field of independent and collegiate school marketing. Inclusion in this list does not imply endorsement by Boarding Schools or the National Association of Independent Schools.

ABM Productions
Anthony Clarkson, Exec. Producer
235 Truesdale Lake Drive
South Salem, NY 10590
(914) 763-5564
Video production for Belvoir Terrace Fine and Performing Arts summer program, Lenox, MA.

Gary Bishop Associates
P.O. Box 12394
Dallas, TX 75225
(214) 368-0889
Video production for Greenhill School, Dallas, TX

Van Burgess Studio
70 Pine Grove Ave.
Summit, NJ 07901
(201) 522-0049
Slide presentations for Old fields School (MD), Purnell School (NJ)

Michael Calia Productions
711 Main St.
Newington, CT 06111
(203) 667-4964
Video production for Ethel Walker School (CT)

Chromuniqué
Geoffrey C. Parker
30 Milk St.
Portland, ME 04101
(207) 773-6887
Video production for New Hampton School (NH)

Creative Communications
Box 1190
Albany, NY 12201
(518) 785-2631
Slide production for Fay School (MA)

Davis Gray, Inc.
Michael Davis and Gary Gray
134 N. Narbeth Avenue, suite 108
Narbeth, PA 19072
(215) 667-3777
Video production for Dwight-Englewood School, (NJ)

Drossos Productions, Inc.
Michael Drossos
25 Huntington Ave., suite 509
Boston, MA 02116
(617) 236-2202
Produced Proctor (NH) slide show

First Take Video
Steve Torbeck
911 East Berridge Lane
Phoenix, AZ 85014
(602) 241-9654
Video production for Orme School

Todd Gipstein Multi-Media Productions
25 Huntington Ave.
Boston, MA 02116
(617) 266-8485
Produced slide tape for Northfield Mount Hermon

Image Presentations
350 Newbury Street
Boston, MA 02115
(617) 536-7089
Video productions for Deerfield Academy (MA), Phillips Exeter Academy (NH), can also produce slides and films.

Learning Resources Network
Sylvia Campbell, Regional Marketing Director
P.O. Box 3416
Durham, NC 27702
(919) 683-8050
Have produced audio-visual shows for over 100 colleges and universities.

Leonardo's Children, Inc.
Anne Macksoud
26 Newport Bridge Rd.
Warwick, NY 10990
(914) 986-6888
Slide productions for George School (PA), Grier School (PA), Kent School (CT), Loomis Chaffee School (CT), Masters School (NY), McCallie School (TN), St. Andrew's (DE), St. Andrew's-Sewanee School (TN), Stoneleigh-Burnham School (MA), Wyoming Seminary (PA). Anne has recently begun to produce live-action videos.

Max Media
William M. Drennen, Jr.
182 Summers St., P.O. Box 831
Charleston, WV 25323
(304) 344-5700
Video for Episcopal High School (VA)

SCL Communications
David L. Cranfill
702 LWW
South Bend, IN 46616
(219) 232-3545
Film for Culver Academies (IN)

Telequest, Inc.
Sam Russell
P.O. Box 25
Princeton, NJ 08542
(609) 799-2105
Film production for Hotchkiss School (CT), video for Brooks School (MA)

Unicorn Video Productions, Inc.
Eileen and Richard Shaw
P.O. Box 2010
Hanover, MA 02339
(617) 849-0950
Video productions for Cranbrook-Kingswood School (MI), St. George's School (RI), Taft School (CT)

Warner-Browne Productions, Inc.
Gerret Warner & John Browne
1 Grafton Common
Box 4
Grafton, MA 01519
(617) 839-2963
Video productions for Brewster Academy (NH), Dana Hall School (MA), The Ethel Walker School (CT), Fountain Valley School (CO), Hill School (PA), MacDuffie School (MA), Milton Academy (MA), Phillips Academy (MA), Princeton Day School (NJ), St. Andrew's School (RI), Tilton School (NH), Wheeler School (RI)

BOARDING SCHOOLS
18 Tremont Street
Boston, MA 02108
(617) 723-6900